

Elaine O'Brien Interview, August 2016

J: June

E: Elaine

J: Hello.

E: Hello.

J: Hi, is this Elaine?

E: Yes, it is.

J: Well, hello Elaine. This is June Hussey in Tucson. Nice to meet you.

E: Oh, hi June, it's nice to meet you, too.

J: Thank you so much for making time in your day to speak with us.

E: Oh, sure.

J: So I'm going to give you a little bit of background up front and tell you why we do these interviews and then I'm going to let you do most of the talking. Does that sound ok?

E: That sounds fine.

J: Perfect, so they may have already mentioned this but we do a lot of these interviews around the country with residents of different Watermark communities and we do it to learn a little bit about each one and get an idea of what brought them to the decision to move into a retirement community in the first place. And then we like to hear about how they selected the one they did and what they think about it now that they moved in. And then what we do with this information is we share it with folks out there who may be just starting to think about what they're going to do in their future or maybe they have never even heard of retirement community before. And we find that it's very helpful for people to hear about it from residents' perspectives. So that's pretty much the background and then one point that I want to make is that we are recording this conversation so that we can have a transcript of it.

E: Sure.

J: And that basically just frees up my hands so that I don't have to make mistakes and take frantic notes but also if you should say something along the way that you do not want to share because it's too personal or whatever you just say so right then and there and then we'll make sure we take that part out before it's published, ok?

E: Ok.

J: Very good, ok so here's the part where I'm going to have you do some talking. I'm going to have you start by just basically introducing yourself. Tell us a little bit about who you are, where you're from, something about your family, your interests that kind of thing and I'll get into some more specific questions from there.

E: Ok, ok. My name is Elaine O'Brien and I was living Gloucester City, New Jersey. It's a lovely community where I could walk everywhere because I don't drive. My eyes aren't good and I stopped driving about 10 years ago. So, up the street I had my church, a supermarket, hairdresser, a drugstore, a nail salon, so I could walk everywhere and I was really happy with that. I had friends that would go out to lunch and whatever. I came last April and the year before that I had a sciatic problem with my leg and it was so serious that I was in bed for like a week and then slowly through therapy it got better. But it left me with a cane and it left me being very unsure of myself as far as walking was concerned. So I could no longer walk around town and do all the things that I love to do. So of course I'm retired by now. My children live in other towns and they would come over and visit but it's still lonely and quite boring. So I looked at the two communities in my own community, in Gloucester City, I looked at the two residential areas they had there and both of them I didn't care for it all. They had cooking in their apartments and all you could do was smell the food as you walked through the hall. And I certainly didn't like that at all. And they just weren't neat and clean and so when my daughter brought me to the Woodbury Mews, as soon

as I walked in the door I loved it because the decor was beautiful, the people were so friendly. And everyone was sitting around the living room kibitzing and everyone was friendly. So then they showed me around and I really did like the way it was set up. We went to the dining hall and we had lunch there. And then I looked at apartments and I found this one-bedroom apartment which I really like. It's very spacious. I have everything that I need here and so I moved in. My children are happy, my grandkids are happy, they come and visit me here. And even my grandkids stayed overnight one night and I just really enjoy it. I am now on, we have a little board here of residents, residents make up the board and I'm the vice president. And what we have started since we've been here is like a welcome wagon for new residents when they come in. We introduce ourselves; we give them a handout of all things pertinent to the Mews. And then we give them a tour and introduce them around because there is nothing nicer than coming to a place and being welcomed by your peers. So I'm very happy to be a part of that. And of course I do other things around here. The activities are great here. They have a lot of entertainment and things that we enjoy, trips, we go on a couple trips a month, which we really enjoy. The only problem is the bus only holds 12 people so it's really hard when a lot of people want to go on the same trip. I wish we had a bigger bus.

J: What are some of the places you've gone on those trips?

E: Oh, we went to, well, we're going to the aquarium next week in Camden. I've gone to shows. We went to see a play. I've gone to, what is that place that we just went to? We went to the Maurice River and had a boat ride and heard all about the history of it. Where else could we go? Oh my gosh, we've been to so many nice places. We went to the casino. That was a lot of fun. And then we also went to this restaurant, well, it's like a restaurant and it's a community all around it and they have little shops there where you can shop and have a wonderful lunch, so we went there and they had us in a private room, which was perfect. And then we shopped around all of us. And we ended up getting ice cream, of course. And then we got back on the bus and came home. So I love those little outings. They break up the week, especially if you don't have visitors coming or whatever. And the entertainment here is great. We have an artist who comes in. We have exercise every day and I enjoy that but I tell you I have put on weight since I've been here because the cooking is good and the food is good and it's three meals a day so, it's tough to resist the desserts.

J: Yeah.

E: So what else can I tell you about it?

J: I'm curious about when you lived in your previous home and you were walking everywhere, did you do that year round, in the winter, too?

E: Oh yeah, yeah because our winters aren't that cold in New Jersey. We hadn't had snow in a while. What happened was the sciatica only bothered me for about a year. I had the problem like a year before I came here and right away my daughter said, "Mom you just can't stay here alone." Meaning being alone with nothing to do, not that I couldn't take care of myself because I can. I don't have a cane or a walker or anything but since I've been here we have Bayada nurses in the building. They are downstairs on the ground level. They have a gym there and all you do is get a note from your doctor and you can have therapy. I've been down there for two different things and the therapists are wonderful with helping us.

J: That's convenient.

E: It really is, yes, you don't have to go out. We also have a dentist that comes here. A doctor, there's a doctor that comes here. I don't know if anyone uses him but it's nice to have those options. I'd rather have my own doctor but you know, in case you needed it, it's wonderful.

J: So let me ask you this, when you think back to your life, when you were on your own in your home to now, would you say, well, what would you say about the difference?

E: Oh my life is improved 100%. It really has. It wasn't seeing anyone from dawn till dusk. If people didn't come over and visit me, I was just out of luck. I'd watch TV and play games on the computer, you know,

that was about it.

J: So it sounds like your world has opened up quite a bit.

E: It has, it really has because I am a friendly person so I really don't have any problem. But that's why we started this little Resident's Committee so that we can orient the new people because some people are so shy you don't notice them for a month.

J: So let's see, let me think of some questions here that we haven't gone over. Now that you've lived there a little while and you've experienced it, do you have any advice to offer people out there that may be, like you were, living on their own and maybe don't realize there are these options out there, what would you say to them?

E: I would tell them that it certainly is not a nursing home because that's what people think right away because you're living in a community. It isn't, it's just independent living for seniors and they should really try it. Everyone that comes here and tries it, I'll tell you 80% of the people love it. And then you're always going to have that 10% that don't like anything, you know, because that's what I've run across since I've been here, that a lot of people, because as you know, I'm on the welcome wagon and so we put ourselves out there to show them everything and give them a heads up on what to do, what time this is and where this is and all that. But some people you just can't please no matter what you do. They won't go to the activities, they don't want to interact so, you know, either they do that on their own then or they can leave, you know. I think the place is wonderful and I would tell everyone that.

J: And what about, you're a single person, are there many couples there? Is it harder or easier if you're a couple to move in?

E: We have quite a few couples here and they are really nice and some of them are like independent. They are both in good shape so the wife can go out shopping or doing something while the men are playing cards or pool but a lot of them to stick together because they're very old or just used to that. A lot of them just come down for meals and then they go out with their families. And then it's sad because one of them might have dementia so the other one is taking care of that person.

J: Right.

E: Yeah but couples, I think it's wonderful to have couples here because they have all the resources that you need for taking care of someone too.

J: Right.

E: You know, they don't have to cook for them, you know, there so many pluses. Some people just come down for their meals, say hi to everyone and just go back, which is fine.

J: Right.

E: But the couples they sit together at dinner, it's really cute, you know.

J: Alright, well, I think we've covered just about all the bases that I wanted to cover. Is there anything else that I may have missed that you think is important?

E: No, I think it's run very well. I don't even object to the bill because, you know, it seems fair and a lot of people have told me they've been to other places that cost a lot more and they don't get what they get here. You know, so I'm just very happy and I'm not senile. So I've been waiting for the call. They asked me to do it and I said, "Well, what is she going to ask me?" They said, "Just about the place." I said, "Oh, ok."

J: Oh good, thank you very much for making yourself available and participating and also for doing that welcome wagon. That's really nice of you and I think it's really an important thing that people feel welcome there.

E: That's the truth and you know what else we do? We show a movie every Sunday night because Sundays are kind of like blah. People go to church. In the afternoon they may do their laundry or be with their family so every Sunday night we show a movie. I pick them out and at 6:30 everyone is in the video room and we all sit and watch a nice movie.

J: That sounds like fun.

E: It is because there's no help around. You know they go home and all that so we have to entertain ourselves.

J: Right.

E: I also have a card game that, we play cards at night, at six o'clock. So there's a lot of things that you know we can do without the help of the staff because they can only do so much.

J: Right, well that's great. It sounds like a great place to live and it sounds like you're very happy so I'm glad.

E: I am, June, I really am so you can send me my hundred bucks.

J: I wish I could!

E: Just kidding.

J: Well thank you again for your time. I appreciate it and you enjoy the rest of your day there, ok?

E: Thank you, you do the same.

J: Alright, take care.

E: Bye-bye.